



**Maynooth  
University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

**Ollscoil Mhá Nuad**

**Maynooth University**

## **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE**

### **PEER REVIEW GROUP REPORT**

#### ***EDUCATION***

#### **ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-18**

March 2017

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## 1. Introduction

Provide a general overview of the review undertaken, description of the department covered, when the review took place etc.

## 2. Peer Review Group Members

Name	Affiliation	Role
<b>Associate Professor Marie Clarke</b>	Dean of Undergraduate Studies University College Dublin	External Reviewer
<b>Professor Robert Davis</b>	School of Education University of Glasgow	External Reviewer (chair)
<b>Dr John Stephens</b>	Dept of Chemistry Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer
<b>Dr Stephanie Rains</b>	Dept of Media Studies Maynooth University	Internal Reviewer

## 3. Timetable of the site visit

- See Appendix 1

The PRG would like to thank the staff of the Quality Office, especially Siobhan Harkin and Helen Berry, for their thorough preparation of the documentation and the schedule of the site visit, all of which was very well organised. The PRG would also like to thank the Education Dept for their collegial welcome and thorough participation in the Review process.

## 4. Peer Review Methodology

### 4.1 Site Visit

The site visit was thorough and extensive. The PRG met with all of the full-time academic staff and the administrative staff of the department, as well as representatives of the student body and many other University staff and external stakeholders. The PRG was very appreciative of the time and thoughtful assistance these colleagues and stakeholders gave in

their discussions, which were of considerable help in gaining a fuller understanding of the Education Department's wide range of activities.

## **4.2 Preparation of the Peer Review Group Report**

An initial draft was prepared collectively by the PRG during the site visit, as part of the preparation for the exit presentation to the department at the end of the visit. This was then revised and completed collectively by email after the site visit.

## **5. Overall Assessment**

### **5.1 Self-Assessment Report**

The PRG would like to thank the Education Dept for the thoroughness and clarity of the Self-Assessment Report, which was accurate and engaged impressively with the spirit of the process of Quality Review. The Report was largely complete, and gave a useful overview of the Department's activities. The CVs of individual staff members would have been more useful than the list of departmental publications, but in general it was a thorough overview of the activities of the Department, as well as its strengths and the challenges it faces. The report appears to have been compiled following extensive engagement with the Quality Review process by the entire department, and with broad participation and contributions.

## **6. Findings of the Peer Review Group: Commendations and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Department governance and organisation**

#### *General Comments and Context*

- 6.1.1 The Education Department is one of twelve departments that comprise the Faculty of Social Sciences, which is the largest Faculty in the University.
- 6.1.2 The Education Department has almost doubled its student enrolment from 462 in 2008 to 856 in 2016 and this is testament to the hard work and dedication and commitment of staff during a period of significant change within the Department and the University and within a broader challenging context in Irish higher education.

#### *Commendations*

- 6.1.3 The Education Department is receiving robust leadership from the Head of Department. The leadership of the Department is clearly dedicated and effective. The PRG was particularly impressed with the openness and candour of the Education staff with respect to ongoing transition, change processes and challenges.
- 6.1.4 The PRG commends the Education Department on its development of a range of new programmes and the associated marketing campaign associated with same.

- 6.1.5 The review group was very impressed with the high esteem in which the department is held by students, graduates and external stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

- 6.1.6 While the Department is clearly successful on any number of evaluative standards, the PRG also observed that the Department was able to articulate relatively few areas where the Department was moving toward clear and measurable goals –this will be particularly important around goals for enrolment growth of the various programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and the enhancement of the student experience.
- 6.1.7 The PRG recommends that the Department therefore develop a strategic plan around future programme offerings particularly with reference to the current and potential research strengths of the Department.
- 6.1.8 The PRG recommends that the Department develop a clear mapping of co-ordinator and leadership roles for courses and teams, including a clearly articulated plan for the rotation of such responsibilities.

## **6.2 Teaching, learning, assessment and student feedback**

### **General Comments and Context**

- 6.2.1 While student : staff ratios in the Education Department are high, this does not appear to have had an adverse impact on the quality of teaching that is provided to Education students.
- 6.2.2 The range of programmes on offer at undergraduate and postgraduate levels includes:
- Certificate in Professional Leadership (Elite Sportspersons - Gaelic Players Association) 10 credits. Approved 2016.
  - Certificate in First Year experiences of newly appointed Principals (Misneach) Post-Primary
  - Certificate in First year experiences of newly appointed Deputy Principals (Tanaiste) Post-Primary
  - B.Sc. (Science Education)
  - B.Sc. (Maths Education)
  - Professional Master of Education (Post-Primary)
  - Postgraduate Diploma in School Guidance Counselling
  - Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership
  - Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Management
  - Master of Education in School Guidance Counselling
  - Master of Education
  - Master of Education (Innovative Teaching and Learning)
  - Master of Literature
  - PhD
  - Certificate in Teacher Education (International Students) – 30 credit Certificate for international students who will follow the PME curriculum for

the first semester; includes school placement experience (Approved 2017. Start Date: Sept. 2017)

- BA + PME Languages or Languages and Music with Education 5 year programme (submitted in Nov. 2016. Start date: Sept. 2018) (co-operation with Departments of Modern Languages and Music)
- Doctor of Education with Specialism (Educational Leadership; Teacher Education). 4 year programme (submitted in Nov. 2016, under external review. Start date: Sept. 2017)
- Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management 1 year programme (submitted in Nov. 2016, under external review; start date: Sept. 2017) (will replace both PGDEL and PGDEM)

6.2.3 The Education Department collaborates currently on two linked modules on Equality in Irish Education offered to B.A. students as an elective in their second year. Teaching non-education students is a new development for the Department. With Froebel, a new Specialism within the new modularised MEd programme on Early Childhood Education; and collaboration has begun between both Departments in the initial stages of creating a network on Mindfulness and Education.

6.2.4 Research into prison education, in a partnership forged with the Irish Prison Service brings the Education Department together with ACED and Applied Social Studies. The BSc with Education (Science and Maths) is a cross-departmental programme, with modules co-developed and co-taught with the Departments of Mathematics and Statistics (ED301); Biology (BI317); and Chemistry (CH419). The Department is strongly allied to other departments, not only within the Faculty, but across the University as a whole.

### *Commendations*

6.2.5 The PRG was impressed with the evident success of the Education Department's students.

6.2.6 Students at all levels in the Department report having a strong sense of belonging to the Department and viewed academic and administrative staff as being open, friendly and approachable.

6.2.7 Academic staff at all levels report having significant latitude to develop their own approach to pedagogy, assessment and innovation in teaching while working in teams with programme leaders and the Head of Department.

6.2.8 The trans / inter-disciplinary nature of the UG and PGT programmes is very evident from programme documentation and student experience.

6.2.9 The PRG noted the positive response of students with whom we met to the range and variety of programmes offered by the Department.

### *Recommendations*

6.2.10 The PRG suggests improving the student feedback mechanisms, in particular to share best practices amongst academic staff. Currently there seems to be a number of mechanisms through which students can offer feedback and the Department should consider rationalising the number of approaches within its

own context. Effective evaluations can provide invaluable data around effectiveness of various pedagogy methods, appropriateness of workload and evaluation methods and where additional support or professional development for academic staff and tutors would be desirable. It would also assist the work of the department if greater coherence could be established between these mechanisms and agreed institution-wide practices.

- 6.2.11 The PRG recommends that a sub-committee be established to review assessment and feedback practices in the Department and their relationship to student learning. Consistency of information with reference to expectations around assessment types and assignments is extremely important. All programmes should review their practices in relation to this aspect.
- 6.2.12 The PRG recommends that students should receive formative written feedback on assignments within a specific, agreed timeframe. Students indicated that there was too much of a time delay between completion of assignments and receipt of feedback. The type of feedback provided to students, which will inform their future learning, is an area for immediate consideration.
- 6.2.13 Students indicated a desire to take advantage of a diversity of pedagogy approaches and assessment mechanisms. Some students express a preference for presentations while others wish to have more courses assessed by writing essays. Some students wish to have more group work while others worry about their efforts rising or falling on the basis of others. Academic staff take varying approaches to pedagogy and assessment, but there does not appear to be a focus on measuring and evaluating the success of particular pedagogy or assessment mechanisms. The PRG therefore recommends that the Department undertake a review of assessment outcomes predicated upon greater transparency and clear explanations of the underpinning rationale.
- 6.2.14 The PRG suggests that the Department develop goals in relation to team teaching. At the moment, it remains unclear how great a priority this remains for the Department or what mechanisms are in place to further develop these opportunities within available resources.
- 6.2.15 The PRG recommends extended critical research-informed reflection on contemporary practice in teaching methodologies in schools and other settings, and their appropriate locus within the teacher education programmes.
- 6.2.16 The rapid expansion of programmes and change needs to be reconsidered into the future particularly with reference to staff capacity and alignment with research activity in the Department.

### **6.3 Research activities and outputs**

#### *General Comments and Context*

- 6.3.1 The Education Department is committed to enhancing the quality, scope and scale of research activity in the Department, in general and more specifically, through the generation of research of the highest international quality and using

its research capacity to better inform practitioner teachers and policy makers nationally and internationally.

- 6.3.2 While the SAR contained a detailed breakdown in terms of volume and type of research outputs, showing a fairly consistent distribution between books, edited books, edited chapters and journal articles, it was less clear how the Department evaluated the quality of those publications.
- 6.3.3 There has been an increase in the PhD community and doctoral students have the opportunity to take modules outside of the Department. Students have a main supervisor and a co-supervisor.

#### ***Commendations***

- 6.3.4 The Department has been very successful in securing research funding.
- 6.3.5 The Department has a healthy and growing community of PhD students. The PRG was impressed by the enthusiasm of these students and their passion for their research projects and for belonging to the research and graduate studies community of the department and university.
- 6.3.6 The research seminars for PhD students and staff facilitate discussion around research activity in a collegial way. This is matched by a positive research and professional training environment across the structured PhD, which is of lasting value to student capacity-building and employability.

#### ***Recommendations***

- 6.3.7 The PRG recommends that the Department develops a research strategy which is clearly aligned to the University strategy for research. An articulation of Education's priorities would assist in focusing on sources of research income within and beyond Maynooth University, and in fostering trans-disciplinary and international initiatives. In the medium to longer term, and subject to coherence with agreed university strategic objectives, the development of a defined research centre in accordance with best international practice in the field should be considered.
- 6.3.8 The PRG recommends that the Education Department develops specific criteria aligned with international benchmarks for assessing research and publications quality. This would assist colleagues in self-evaluation, collaborative working and in developing annual appraisal or other career development routes and research goals.
- 6.3.9 The departmental workload model should be enhanced in order to ensure that all staff have the opportunity to develop their research publications and profiles.

### **6.4 Staffing, staff development and Resources**

#### ***General Comments and Context***

- 6.4.1 The PRG met the administrative staff and the academic staff during the site visit.



- 6.4.2** The Department has 13 full time academic members of staff, in addition has 2 members of staff who are 50% joint appointments with (Department of Adult and Community Education and with Department of Sociology). There is one Emeritus Senior Lecturer (20%). The administrative staff is as follows Senior Executive Assistant (50%); Senior Executive Assistant (70%); Executive Assistant (100%); Executive Assistant (42%); Executive Assistant (50%); Chief Technical Officer (100%).
- 6.4.3** The Department occupies a state of the art bespoke building of which many of its competitor Education Departments nationally and internationally would be most envious. The new building houses two other departments (Adult and Community Education; and the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education) as well as the Centre for Teaching and Learning. It is a tremendous asset to the Department, the Faculty and the University and will enable the Department to develop and effectively implement its learning and teaching and research activities.

#### *Commendations*

- 6.4.4 The PRG commends both the collegial approach of staff and the positive working environment that currently exists and which supported the department through challenging and difficult transitional periods.
- 6.4.5 The PRG was impressed with the enthusiasm and engagement of all staff in delivering the multiple activities of the Department, which include a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, a significant number of research students and scholarly research by academic staff.
- 6.4.6 The quality of the physical environment and infrastructure is exceptional.

#### *Recommendations*

- 6.4.7 The PRG recommends that the distribution of the workload of administrative staff be kept under regular review – with reference to internal and external programme administration. Further, issues pertaining to contractual matters should be dealt with in a timely manner.
- 6.4.8 The PRG recommends the formulation of a workload model for *all* members of academic staff, as part of the fashioning of the 2018 University Strategic Plan that is transparent and made available to the department at the start of the academic year.
- 6.4.9 The PRG recommends that the Education Department develops and establishes research supports for staff as part of their career development and the pursuit of the research goals of the Department. These might include, where relevant, sabbatical planning, and rebalancing of teaching, co-ordination, and administrative commitments.
- 6.4.10 The PRG recommends the implementation of a structured mentoring system in order to assist all staff, academic, administrative and technical, in career and professional development.

## 6.5 Management of Quality and Enhancement

### ***General Comments and Context***

6.5.1 Teaching, learning and research are three central pillars in the Education Department where their academic-driven processes prove beneficial to the student learning experience, are identifiable in the practices of research, and are embedded in the community through the varied processes of teaching, learning and knowledge production.

### ***Commendations***

6.5.2 There is laudable drive and ambition within the academic community to succeed in maintaining their exceptional records and standards of teaching, learning and research.

### ***Recommendations***

6.5.3 The Department should develop a framework within its existing governance structures to ensure that academic/professional expertise continues to thrive within the culture of research-led teaching, by aiming to achieve more balanced workloads; leading to clearly-defined promotion pathways for staff.

6.5.4 The PRG recommends a thorough review of the responsibilities, workloads, expectations, and career pathways for all administrative and technical staff in the department.

6.5.5 The Department should ensure continued active involvement of academic staff in the development of all of the processes surrounding teaching and learning, both within the department and across the university, in order to continuously enhance the teaching and learning experience of the students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

6.5.6 The PRG recommends that the quality of academic standards is monitored carefully through feedback on curriculum, teaching and learning.

6.5.7 The PRG recommends enhanced cohesion between the work of the department of Education, the other departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Research Institutes, and the leadership of the university.

## 6.5 Internal and external engagement

The PRG was impressed with the level of internal and external engagement by the Department. Members of staff are represented on a range of high level committees in the university. It is also clear that staff are actively engaged with a range of high level stakeholders in the Irish education system, (Department of Education and Skills; Education Centres and associations representing educational professions). It is also clear that staff are very engaged in the wider European and international education context through participation in conferences, membership of education bodies and through an expanding portfolio of collaborative research projects and proposals.

APPENDIX 1: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: PEER REVIEW GROUP SITE VISIT TIMETABLE

Tuesday, 21 <sup>st</sup> February, 2017			
Time	Description		Venue
19:00	<p>Convening of the Peer Review Group.</p> <p>Briefing by: Siobhán Harkin, Director of Strategy and Quality PRG agrees a Chair, and discuss the visit. Identification of any aspects requiring clarification or additional information.</p> <p>Dinner for members of the Peer Review Group and Director for Strategy &amp; Quality &amp; University Executive Member</p>		<p>Carton House Hotel booked at 7pm for 6 people under the name Harkin</p> <p>Siobhan Harkin Aidan Mulkeen Robert Davis Marie Clarke John Stephens Stephanie Rains</p>
Wednesday, 22 <sup>nd</sup> February, 2017			
Time	Description		Venue
8:30- 8.45	Convening of Peer Review Group; Director of Quality available to group		Council Room
8:45 -9:30	Professor Sharon Todd, Head of Department		Council Room
9:30 -10:30	Group meeting with all Department staff (Head of Department recused)		SE230 School of Education
10:30-11:15	Visit to core facilities of Department, escorted by Professor Sharon Todd		School of Education / Library/North Campus
11:15 -11:30	Refreshments		Council Room
11:30-11.50	Parallel Session1/CR Dr Delma Byrne	Parallel Session2/PB Dr Grace O’Grady Skype	Council Room & Presidents Boardroom
11.50-12.10	Professor Aislinn O’Donnell	Mr Arthur Dunne	
12.10-12.30	Dr Catriona O’Toole	Ms Angela Rickard	
12.30-12.50	Ms Anne Lavelle, Ms Georgina Sherlock,	Ms Paula Kinnarney	
12.50-13.10	Ms Marie Hanley Ms Carmel Lillis	Dr Bernie Grummell	
13.30 -14:30	Working Lunch		Pugin Hall/Reserved Table with service for Quality/4 people
14:30 -15:00	Meet with Students: Undergraduate Students (10)		Council Room
15.00.-15.30	PG Taught Students (8)		
15.30-16.00	PME Students (10)		
16.00-16.30	PhD Students (5)		

16.30-17:00	Break	Council Room
17.00-17.30	Professor Maria Pramaggiore, Dean of Graduate Education	Council Room
17.30.-18.00	Professor Aidan Mulkeen, VP Academic & Registrar	
18.00	PRG meeting – identification of any areas for clarification and finalisation of tasks for following day	Council Room
20:00	PRG private working dinner	Carton House Hotel/Booked at <u>8.00pm</u> for 4 people under the name Stephens

Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2017

Time	Description	Venue	
8:30-8:45	Convening of Peer Review Group	Council Room	
8.45:-9.00	Stakeholder Calls Tomas O'Ruairc Director Teaching Council	Council Room/President Boardroom	
9.00-9.15	Elizabeth Tynan Guidance Counsellor Mr John Bean Principal Hartstown Community School		
9.15-9.45	Professor Maurice Devlin, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences	Council Room	
9.45 - 10:15	Rosaleen McCarthy (HR Director) & Peter Miller (Senior HR Manager)	Council Room	
10.15-10.45	Professor Bernard Mahon, former VP for Research	Council Room	
10.50-11.10 11.10-11.30 11.30-11.50 11.50-12.10 12.10-12.30	Parallel Session1/CR Dr Nikolaos Fotou Dr Anthony Malone Dr Celine Healy Dr Rose Dolan Mr Conor Harrison	Parallel Session2/RCR Dr Majella Dempsey Dr Victoria Showunmi Dr Thomas Walsh Dr Pdraig Hogan Mr Rod Walsh, Ms Kathleen Gorman, Ms Ann Marie Cudden	Council Room & Registrars Conference Room
13:00-14:00	Working Lunch	Pugin Hall/Reserved Table with service for Quality, 4 people	
14:00-16:30	Preparation of Exit Presentation	Council Room	
16:30-17:00	Exit presentation to all departmental staff, made by the Chair of the PRG, summarising the principal commendations and recommendations of the Peer Review Group.	SE131/School of Education	
17:00	Refreshments and Exit of the PRG	SE131/School of Education	